

What Kind of Listener Are You?

These listening types are borrowed from Dale Carnegie, the win-friends-and-influence-people people. For each type, consider whether and how each describes you as a listener – a lot, a little or not at all. Keep in mind that self-reflection is the place to start in becoming a better listener.

- **Preoccupied:** Multitask while others speak
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Out-to-Luncher:** Daydream in discussions; physically but not mentally present
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Interrupter:** Eager to verbalize the conversation in your own head
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Whatever:** Feel and appear uninterested; stay out of the discussion
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Combative:** Challenge and dismiss others' words and ideas
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Analyst:** Pick apart what's said, whether asked to or not
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

- **Engager:** Listen with eyes and ears and focus on the speaker's words and body language
 - A lot
 - A little
 - Not at all

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What Kind of Listener Are You? *continued*

Strategies to Strengthen Listening Skills

So who are you as a listener? How do you need to improve? Consider strategies that can help you become a better listener.

- Before a discussion, think through what you might want to say or questions you have on the topic and make notes for yourself. You'll be more ready to listen to others if you're not thinking about your own responses.
- Related strategy: if you're distracted by another problem or issue, before the discussion write down your concerns and then set them aside. Experts say this kind of "brain dump" works to release distractions and improve focus.
- Make eye contact with the speaker to help you pay attention and keep your mind from wandering.
- If the speaker talks too fast or too low, say something. It's tempting to tune out when you can't hear or understand.
- Ask questions to help you follow a speaker's logic and stay engaged as a listener.
- Paraphrase a speaker's points to check how well you've listened and understood.
- Be aware of your listening habits – like the tendency to be combative or to overanalyze – and work to check yourself.
- Forget about multitasking. Research confirms that most people can only do one thing at a time well. If you need to be listening, then just listen.
- If you're an organizational leader, model engaged listening and set a tone that confirms listening is as important as having something to say.

Sources: Listener labels from "Seven Types of Listeners and Tips for Better Listening Skills," August 24, 2010, www.dalecarnegiewaysf.com; some tips based on suggestions in "Tuning In: Improving Your Listening Skills," The Wall Street Journal online, July 22, 2014.